

Book Reviews Teamworking Skills for Social Workers, Ruben Martin, Open University Press, 2013, pp. 144, ISBN 978 033524 605 2

I was very pleased to be invited to review this book. As a lecturer in social work and nursing education, I believe that teamworking is essential for effective interventions with individuals, groups and communities. Serious case reviews such as those of 'Baby Peter' (Jones, 2009), Winterbourne View hospital (Department of Health, 2012) and the Francis report (Francis, 2013) into hospital care, cite lack of communication and the inability to communicate effectively in and between teams as contributory factors in the poor care, and in some cases the death, of people in social and health care services. This book not only is a timely addition to social work education, but is useful for a range of professionals. Martin draws the reader in with his deceptively easy prose, moving seamlessly from his almost apologetic introduction asking 'Is there enough to say about teamwork to warrant a whole book?' to the following ten chapters, which, in the opinion of this reviewer, answer the question with an emphatic 'Yes'. Presented in two sections, Part 1 'Overview of teamworking' offers a 'toolkit' approach providing an introduction to theories and models of team working, while Part 2, 'Applying teamworking skills in practice', takes a more traditional textbook approach. Martin states that the book is aimed at social work students and early career social workers in community settings rather than residential and day services workers. However, this possibly under-estimates the scope and relevance of the book. This is especially true of Part 1, which begins with an overview of teamworking, and its underpinning knowledge, skills and values. This section of the book also provides a range of tools to promote team development, assess individual team roles and analyse problems in teamwork, all of which could usefully be applied to residential service teams. Chapter 2 includes useful overviews and applications of Transactional Analysis and ecological theories. Chapter 4 includes a brief introduction to Belbin's team roles and characteristics. Each chapter introduces different teamwork theories and includes exercises and models to encourage individuals and teams to analyse their own skills and attitudes in relation to teamwork. Case studies and reflection exercises assist the reader in applying theories to practice. The challenge to Martin is in packing this book with as many tools as can be usefully applied to team work while keeping it short. The result is that the author inevitably has to refer readers to other texts for fuller explanations or applications. Therein, the

strength also becomes a weakness—the brevity of each tool or model may give the beginning teamworker a false sense of skill. An exception to this brevity is the inclusion of Tuckman’s model of group work, which receives a generous page and a half in Chapter 3, ‘The life of teams’, and, while it remains important in terms of groupwork, it sits uncomfortably in this work. Part 2 feels much more like a traditional textbook, critiquing teamworking practice. Martin invites the reader to explore the culture and ethos of organisations and how these impact on teamwork. He examines some of the boundaries preventing effective teamwork with reference to the Professional Capabilities Framework (for social work students and practitioners in England; The College of Social Work, 2014) and the Munro report into child protection (Munro, 2011). Chapter 7 discusses how skills can be applied to multidisciplinary teams, while interprofessional collaboration is examined in Chapter 8. Chapters on multidisciplinary teams and interprofessional collaboration discuss some of the issues of working with service users and carers. On balance, more might have been explored in these sections. For example, recent developments in community work such as ‘Circles of Support’ for people with learning disabilities and with offenders mean that service users and carers play an increasingly large part in social work teams, yet the book offers little insight into how partnership or effective teamwork might be achieved in these teams. In conclusion, Martin cautions the reader not to assume that simply reading the book will automatically produce an excellent teamworker; while this is undoubtedly the case, this book provides an excellent introduction to teamworking. This is not simply a book about teamwork; it is a book about communication, organisational analysis and much more.

References

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